

FAMILY PATHOLOGY IN VIJAY TENDULKAR'S *SILENCE! THE COURT IS IN SESSION* AND MAHESH DATTANI'S *THIRTY DAYS IN SEPTEMBER*

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Abstract

The family is the oldest institution on the Earth and an ideal family assures care, love, trust and confidence to the children and they feel safe, however turbulent the outside world is. If there is mal-adaptive behavior present with the family members, there arises pathological condition. The greater the family pathology, the greater the conflict and disorder in the family. There are two main reasons for the family pathology: one is Intra-familial and another is extra-familial. Family is a main arena of both Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani. In the post-modern era, families experience, pathological condition, resulting in family disintegration. Leela Benare in 'Silence! The Court is in Session' and Mala and her mother Shanta in 'Thirty Days in September' suffer the trauma of child sex abuse, incest, multiple betrayals and untold turmoils. Tendulkar portrays the great family pathology of unmarried motherhood and the hostile attitude of male dominated Indian society in 'Silence! The Court is in Session'. Both the plays highlight the diminishing Indian family values and the hollowness of the Indian society. Vijay Tendulkar's Leela Benare is branded as a rebel and a non-conformist by the society. Mahesh Dattani's Mala experiences psychological instability and formulates her own way of life, taking vengeance on the male community.

Key words: *lone-mother family, abandoned married women, incest, and child sex abuse, intra-familial, extra-familial.*

Introduction

The family is the oldest institution on the Earth and plays a vital role in human society. A happy family is a haven, which provides safety and security for women and children. An ideal family assures care, love, trust and confidence to the children and they feel safe, however trouble-filled the outside world is.

Pathology comes from the ancient Greek roots of 'pathos' meaning, "to experience" or "to suffer," is a significant study of the root cause of the disease and major field in the modern medicine. Pathological condition of the family arises, if

there is mal adaptive behavior present with the family members, Family pathology is positively related to children's emotions and behaviors. Children develop moral boundaries, sense of personal worth, learn the meaning of love and trust by bonding with their parents, kith and kins and neighbours. If the abuser is a trusted parent or other family members or relations, it results in family pathology.

Indian families are highly cohesive and bound by close kinship ties. They live a shared life and subordination of an individual autonomy to group cohesiveness, is commonly seen in Indian families. Strong families do make strong societies. The greater the family pathology is, the greater the conflict and disorder in the family will be.

There are two main reasons for family crisis and family pathology: one is Intra-familial: where the problems arise within the family, in the inter-personal relationships, such as pre-marital relationships, illegal pregnancy, abortion, death of the spouse, extra marital affairs, alcoholism, marital discord, abandoned spouses, single-parent, sexual incompatibility, child sex abuse by the biological kith and kin; HIV affected spouse; murder in the family; abnormal children- physical, mental and psychological abnormalities of the family members come under this category and another is Extra-familial: where the problems are beyond the control of an individual family. From the industrial age to current cyber age the world experiences pluralism and multiculturalism with increasing immigrants and emigrants. People experience displacement due to war, natural calamities, economic depression, famine, epidemic and pandemic diseases – all these cause social pathology which in turn cause family disintegration. Though India is a country known for its family values, India too faces family crisis, with the increasing divorce rates and increasing counter-culture: living together without marriage, same sex marriage, adoption of children without marriage, increase disintegration of families, as it is said that post-modernism celebrates family disintegration. Post-modern families break the traditional assumption of 'true' or 'real family' or 'home' and has lost its cultural connotation of 'home' where one enjoys protection, security and safety and it deconstructs the saying, 'East or West, Home is the Best.'

Family crisis poses a great threat to the function of the society. India is basically a patriarchal society, where the social structure, patriarchal values, gender norms and cultural norms suffocate women and they find themselves continuously betrayed, not only by the societal values but by their own family members. Men continue to rule the homes and societies but unjustly.

. . . the most hateful aristocracy ever established on the face of the globe
This oligarchy of sex which makes father, brothers, husband, sons, the oligarchs over the mother and sisters, the wife and daughters of every household - which ordains all men sovereigns, all women subjects, carries dissension, discord and rebellion into every home of the nation (Anthony, para 5)

Says, Susan B. Anthony who devoted herself to the cause of women's rights in the late 18th century in the campaign for female suffrage in New York.

In Vijay Tendulkar's *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967) the protagonist, Leela Benare emerges from a pathological family and the pathology arises from intra-familial reasons. She faces loss of social trust and experiences multiple betrayals. Accused of illegal pregnancy, she is forced to abort the illegal offspring. The society blames her as sinful and not the males who caused her suffering.

Tendulkar portrays a grave family pathology of unmarried motherhood and the hostile attitude of the male dominated Indian society. The protagonist Leela Benare is introduced as a school teacher by profession and she is forced to reveal the dark secrets of her life, in the past, in the mock trial, setting up a trial scene in the court, the play within the play, a brilliant dramatic technique. She involuntarily reveals how she faced multiple exploitations.

Benare, when she was 14 years old was seduced by her own maternal uncle. She feels guilty and sinful and says: "It is true, I did commit a sin. I was in love with my mother's brother" (3.117). She continues,

BENARE, He praised by bloom everyday. He gave me love If you felt that just being with him gave a whole meaning to life and if he was your uncle, it was a sin! Why? I was hardly fourteen! I didn't even know what sin was – I swear by my mother.... and my brave man turned tail and ran. (3.117).

Leela Benare's mother has no voice against this atrocity as she is bound in tradition. She is a single-parent, probably abandoned by her husband. There is no mention of Leela Benare's father in the play. Her maternal uncle takes advantage of this primary pathological condition and abuses her sexually, intensifying the pathology. However, she manages to emerge as a successful teacher, dedicating herself to the cause of education of the children. But again, as a youth, faces betrayal from her employer, Professor Damle. Benare in her quest for true love, falls victim to her maternal uncle at the age of 14 and later as a 34 year old woman to Professor Damle.

BENARE, Again I fell in love as grown women. I threw all my heart into it; I thought this will be different, this love is intelligent It isn't love at all – its worship. But it was the same mistake. I offered up my body on the altar of my worship. And my intellectual God took the offering – and went his way. He wasn't a God. He was a man for whom everything was of the body, for the body. That's all, again the body! (3.118).

Life becomes burdensome when the society blames only the females for the illegal pregnancy. She cannot even turn to her mother for help or any other, in the society. She blames herself and the sexual urge she calls it a 'traitor'(3.118). As per one study, some victims have self-hatred and destructive feelings on them "I hated my

body because it had responded to the stimulation of the abuser” admits Reba (“The Secret Wounds,” para.12). Leela Benare musters up courage and wants to live only for her child. She says “My own existence, I want my body now for him, for him alone. (*She shuts her eyes and mutters in mortal pain*). He must have a mother . . . a father to call his own – a house – to be looked after - he must have a good name” (3.118).

In the Marathi culture, the place of maternal uncle is of immense cultural importance because during the marriage ceremony, the Kanyadan is usually performed by the maternal uncle. His place is next to the father. If he betrays her and if her mother hides that, where else the teenage girl would seek help? Leela Benare being betrayed by her mother and her maternal uncle, manages to become a teacher but falls victim to her employer. Erosion of family values is clearly presented in this play.

A survey shows that most victims are girl children molested by their biological fathers and step fathers. Abuse takes place at the hands of older siblings, uncles, grand fathers and adult acquaintances. Dr.J.Patric Gannon explains that when children face child sex abuse, “the process of trust-building gets de-railed. The abuser betrays the child’s trust, robs her of any semblance of safety, privacy and self respect and uses her as an object of self gratification” (“The Secret Wounds,” para.6).

Mahesh Dattani’s *Thirty Days in September* (2001) paces with *Silence! The Court is in Session* (1967), in its heart rendering delineation of child sex abuse. The play was commissioned by a Delhi based institution RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest), which came into existence in 1996 to help and support the adult women survivors, who fell prey to the beastly instinct of their own kith and kin. Having agreed to the request of RAHI to write a play on this subject, Mahesh Dattani, interviewed more than half a dozen victims and worked on 12 case histories and finished this touching play.

Thirty Days in September is more powerful and poignant than *Silence! The Court is in Session*, in its portrayal of agony, wounded self and sexual trauma of the protagonist Mala. When she was seven years old, she was molested repeatedly, by her own maternal uncle, Vinay, whenever he visits them or they visit him during her summer vacation. Whenever Mala approaches her mother to express her trauma, she finds her mother not paying attention to her and remains silent. Her mother’s deaf ear, blind eye, silent heart and numb mind is so unnatural to Mala and as well as to the audience and Shanta’s silence increases the trauma of Mala and the tension of the audience. Shanta, as a mother fails to be a Mala’s confidant. This emotional alienation agonizes her more than the pain of the sexual abuse of her maternal uncle. The mother simply remains silent, praying to Lord Krishna. Mala in her outrage picks up the glass-framed portrait of Lord Krishna and flings into pieces. Her hatred towards her mother keeps increasing and again and again she blames her for failing in her duty

as a mother, to offer motherly love and to safeguard her. This is evident in these poignant lines

MALA (*to Shanta*), where were you when he locked the door to your bedroom while I was napping in there? Where were you during those fifteen minutes when he was destroying my soul? Fifteen minutes every day of my summer holidays, add them up. Fifteen minutes multiplied by thirty or thirty one or whatever that is how long or how little it took for you to send me to hell for the rest of my life. Surely you must have known, Ma (3.53).

Child sex abuse is an overwhelming, damaging and humiliating assault on a child's body, mind and soul and thus been called "the ultimate betrayal" ("The Secret Wounds," para.1,7). Mala pours out her anguish - ". . . If only you had looked into my eyes and seen the hurt or asked me 'beta what's wrong?' Then may be, I would have told you" (3.53). She accuses her mother for not observing her and questioning her. She has lost all her trust and confidence in her mother "I knew . . . you will never ask me that question. Because you already knew the answer" (3.53).

Mother is the one who could understand the feelings of the children prior to their expression. Here Mala finds her mother deliberately avoid listening to her. Mala does not find a shoulder to cry, a rescuer to rely on, not a person to share her emotional wounds. Mala's mother Shanta admits her grave fault "Yes. Yes! I only remained silent. I am to blame" (3.54) and tries to justify her silence "how could I save her when I could not save myself" (3.55). Shanta outbursts her own pain and agony which freezes Mala, Deepak and also the audience "I was six Mala, I was six and he was thirteen and it wasn't only in summer holidays, for ten years! for ten years! . . . I can't shout for help" (3.55). She reaches the state of numbness, where neither pain nor pleasure affects her.

Mala feels worthless and she neither loves anyone nor is ready to receive love from anyone, as she believes that no love is true. The therapist says to Deepak "All she needs is some love and attention and she will be fine" (2.49). The psychologically affected Mala says to Deepak, that she sees her abuser everywhere. When Shanta pleads her to go with Deepak to learn love and learn to forget. Mala says,

MALA, By staying silent doesn't mean I can forget!
This is my hell. This hell is where I belong! It is your creation, Ma! You created it for me. With your silence! You didn't forget anything, you only remained silent (3.54).

Shanta is desperate being deserted by her husband and Mala blames her mother for that. The father left them for another woman and she has not seen him for fifteen years. She tells "He left because of you. You did not love him. The only reason you shared my room was because you didn't want to sleep with him" (2.35,36). This

shows another side of Shanta that she could not engage herself in sexual life with her husband because of the trauma that she experienced in her childhood. A case history says, the victims show symptoms of inability to enjoy marital intimacies. Linda confesses: "I find the sexual side of marriage to be the hardest thing in my life. I get the most dreadful sensation that it is my father there and I get panicky" ("The Secret Wounds," para.10). Shanta too would have experienced similar feeling and so her husband would have left her.

In the final Act, Mala's mother Shanta admits her grave fault and in her utter despair, picks up one of the glass pieces of the broken portrait of Lord Krishna and Jabs it in her mouth, punishes herself for not saving her child. Shanta's last minute disclosure of her own trauma makes Mala's heart melt and Mala says, "It's not your fault, mother. Just as it wasn't my fault. Please tell me that you have forgiven me for blaming you. Please tell me that" (3.58).

Victims of child sex abuse may develop compulsive immoral desires. "I led a promiscuous life and would end up having sexual relations with complete strangers"- admits Jill, as per one case history ("The Secret Wounds," para.10). It is true with Mala too. Mala's frustration transforms her into a negative personality and her sexual perversion is a result of repeated molestation faced by her. She formulates her own way of living as she could not trust anyone, not even Deepak, who is ready to marry her. She keeps a calendar that she changes men once in thirty days and before they discard her, she discards them. In this way she wants to take revenge on the men folk. She finds her own way of survival as no one comes to her rescue, not even her mother.

The mothers of Leela Benare and Mala could not come to their rescue as they are traditionally bound and want to hide the truth. They are helpless as they themselves faced betrayal from their husbands and no one helped them. They are weak, meek, docile and afraid to raise voice against any wrong. Both the families are lone-mother family. Shanta cannot stop her brother from ruining her daughter's life as she relies on him for her economic survival and to bring up her child and is compelled to accept the financial aid offered by her brother and allows him to prey upon her own daughter. As she could not turn to anyone Shanta, turned to Lord Krishna like Draupati, in a totally helpless state turned to Lord Krishna. Shanta throws her burden on god and she believes that, god alone can put an end to her suffering.

"Not all children react to abuse in the same way. . . . It depends on child's relationship to the abuser, severity of the abuse, how long the abuse lasted, the child's age and other factors" ("The Secret Wounds," para.4). Some could recover in a short period. Leela Benare in *Silence! The Court is in Session*, is able to reconcile. Many victims suffer deep emotional wounds, which is true in the case of Mala in *Thirty Days in September*. It is very difficult for her to cope-up as she has been repeatedly abused, that too for a long time. Leela Benare can defend herself and attack the male dominated society. Whereas it took long time for Mala to come out of her trauma,

haunting memories, tormenting emotions. Mala and her mother Shanta, filled with self pity, consider themselves emotionless, lifeless vegetables. They become immune to all feelings.

Sexually abused victims suffer an array of symptoms: depression, guilt, shame, rage, emotional shutdown, i.e., state of inability to express or even feel emotional, low self-esteem and powerlessness. Sally recalls “each time he molested me, I felt powerless, frozen, numb, stiff and confused” (“The Secret Wounds,” para.9). Mala too feels the same.

Victims may also have difficulty in maintaining healthy relationships. Some may not relate to men, some may sabotage friendships and marriages and some may avoid close relationships. It is true with Mala too. Though Deepak comes to Mala’s rescue, she is not willing to accept the true love of Deepak initially. But after four years of counselling, she is able to come out of self-pity and self-doubt and able to come back to normal. Leela Benare and Mala, both lack moral compass and they lack social trust. Wherever they turn, they face betrayal and they cannot trust anyone. The dramatist conveys that the parents should provide moral compass for their children.

Conclusion

The horror and pain of incest and child sex abuse, so powerfully portrayed by these two dramatists. The families are stripped off, the society is ripped off. Both convey how child sex abuse dehumanizes the victims and destabilizes the society. They awaken the heart and conscience of everyone and the conscience of the society too. He urges the society that something should be done urgently to stop such soul-destroying pathology of child sex abuse.

According to the Progress of the World’s Women 2019-2020 Report by United Nations women, an estimated 4.5% of all Indian households are run by single mothers which is around 13 million households where lone-mothers live alone with their children. Worldwide nearly one in every seven children under age 18 years – 320 million children are living in a single-parent household, mostly in lone-mother families.

Vijay Tendulkar, when he was sharing his experience with Gouri Ramnarayan on February 8th 1996 mentioned that he was restless, upset, agitated, helpless and even felt murderous when he observed the hypocrisies of the society. Dattani also says with regard to *Thirty Days in September* in the interview by Anitha Santhanam (2011), ‘It is the silence that affects me most. It is a silence and betrayal of the family that affects me the most, like in this case, the mother knew that her daughter was being sexually abused by her uncle but still chose to keep quite’ (Santhosh Kumar Sonker, 2011).

Vijay Tendulkar and Mahesh Dattani endeavor to remove the veil of silence, remove the cloud that darkens the society, while treating a sensitive and taboo issue of incest and child sex abuse. Both insist on the role of parent, especially the mother, in

nurturing the children. Both urge that women and womanhood must be honoured in the society.

Family is a first society for the child. Family should assure social trust for the child. The two dramatists underscore the need for moral compass in the society and that would help man display divine qualities in him as Vivekananda says, 'Every human is potentially divine'. Let art – literature or any other form should help man reflect divine qualities, so that peace and happiness exist in the family, society and in the world.

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